THE ROAD

Cormac McCarthy
BIOGRAPHY

• Born in Rhode Island on July 20, 1933
• Third of six children born to Charles Joseph and Gladys Christina McGrail McCarthy
• Originally named Charles after his father, but changed his name to Cormac like the Irish king
• Family moved to Knoxville, Tennessee when he was four, and then to Washington D.C. where his father was the principal attorney in a law firm until his death
BIOGRAPHY

• Raised Roman Catholic
• Attended the University of Tennessee with a major in Liberal Arts
• After a year at college, he joined the Air Force where he remained for four years. He was stationed in Alaska for two of them and hosted a radio show while there.
• Returned to the University of Tennessee and published two short stories, one of which one him a student creative writing award
BIOGRAPHY

- After graduating, he moved to Chicago and worked as an auto mechanic while working on his first novel.
- Married Lee Holleman, with whom he had one son.
- Published his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, in 1965.
- Divorced Lee and accepted a travelling scholarship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters which he used to travel to Ireland.
Met his second wife, Anne DeLisle, during his travels in Europe. They were married in 1966.

Won a Rockefeller Foundation Grant in 1966, which he and Anne used to travel throughout Europe

Returned to the US and settled again in the Knoxville area

Published *Outer Dark* in 1968
BIOGRAPHY

- Publishes *Child of God* in 1973
- Writes a screenplay *The Gardener’s Son*, which premiered in 1977
- Separated from Anne in 1976 and moved to El Paso, where he lived for many years
THE ROAD

- Published in 2006
- Won the Pulitzer Prize for Literature in 2007
- Won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction
- *The Road* trailer: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94Kcl0gLq1A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94Kcl0gLq1A)
- Oprah Interview: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RmgK0ds2d4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RmgK0ds2d4)
STYLE

• No chapters
• Short vignettes break up the narrative
• Lack of punctuation: no contractions, no quotation marks, no semi-colons or colons, and few commas
• Sparse dialogue
• Unnamed characters
• Blend of short, abrupt sentences and longer, intricately descriptive ones
• Use of archaic and blunt vocabulary
TROPES

- Common pattern, theme, motif, or figure of speech in which words are used in a different way than their literal meaning
- Tropes in *Great Gatsby*: eyes, cars and driving, colors, etc.
- DREAMS AND MEMORY: most of the man’s dreams recall lost pastoral, edenic imagery
- Eve: “In dreams his pale bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy. Her nipples pipeclayed and her rib bones painted white. She wore a dress of gauze and her dark hair was carried up in combs of ivory, combs of shell. Her smile, her downturned eyes” (15)
- Gothic elements: pale, bone, virginal elements
THE MAN AS ANTI-ADAM

- “He dreamt of walking in a flowering wood where birds flew before them he and the child and the sky was aching blue but he was learning how to wake himself from just such siren worlds. Lying there in the dark with the uncanny taste of a peach from some phantom orchard fading in his mouth...Like the dying world the newly blind inhabit, all of it slowly fading from memory.” (15-16)

- This darkening, dying, myopic world underscores how lost the paradise of old truly is.

- The man literally sees world being uncreated before his eyes.

- The man’s gesture of laying the photograph “down in the road” is a renunciation and farewell.

- He’s lost his Eve.
As a boy the man remembers how men set a bolus of “serpents” on fire, “having no remedy for evil but only for the image of it as they conceived it to be” and as the snakes burn, “they were mute” and “there were no screams of pain.” (159)

Remind us of the consequences of the fall, the consequences of the desire for ever-greater knowledge.

Evokes man’s destruction of the natural world & reveals how language (“evil”) can obscure truth.
There are 40 episodes of eating in the novel

Share a candlelit dinner and eat out of BONE CHINA

Pull around a shopping cart, which is a blatant reminder of a time of plenty

The man and boy subsist on rotting apples for a while (Hey, lost Eden imagery) and the boy chooses pears first out of all the food in the bunker

For Medieval and Renaissance painters, apples represented the fall and pears redemption

French *pere* (distinguishes a father from a son) with plural form referring to both physical and spiritual fathers
RITUALS

• Ritual: 1. any practice or pattern of behavior regularly performed in a set manner; 2. a system or collection of religious or other rites.

• “Since ‘culture’ has been destroyed in this narrative and belongs to the void in a sense, the father’s replication of [rituals] seems a strategic attempt to maintain a sense of dignity and a meaningful connection to human history as a means of surviving in this raw new world, where barbarity and the threat of cannibalism continuously loom” (Wilhelm 132).

• Attempts domestic rituals to construct a meaningful, structured world for the boy

• Claude Levi-Strauss: “in preparing food for…consumption, by symbolic understanding of the ritual character of eating, and by the evolution of table manners, we crossed over from the wild to the tame, from nature to culture” (Davenport 11).

• Man tousles boy’s hair before a fire “like some ancient anointing…‘So be it. Evoke the forms. Where you’ve nothing else construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them’” (63).

• ELY
In his essay “Nature,” Emerson wrote how Nature can be viewed as a sacred text or hieroglyph where man finds “reason and faith” through its “uncontained and immortal beauty” (487-488).

McCarthy’s landscape is much more bleak, foreboding, and fiery - more of a hellscape than an Eden.

Etymology of Apocalypse: Greek apo-calyptein, meaning to “un-veil.”

The inner landscape of the tormented human mind and the burned and blackened physical landscape they must navigate on their quest to the sea.
STATE OF LANGUAGE

• “The wall beyond held a frieze of human heads” their skulls tattooed with “runic slogans, creeds misspelled,” some painted and signed across the forehead in a scrawl…He’d come to see a message in each such late history, a message and a warning, and so this tableau of the slain and the devoured did prove to be” (76-77).

• “They began to come upon from time to time small cairns of rock by the roadside. They were signs in gypsy language, lost patterns…hopeless messages to loved ones lost and dead” (180-181).

• “They passed through towns that warned people away with messages scrawled on billboards. The billboards had been whited out with thin coats of paint in order to write on them…of advertisements for goods with no longer existed” (127-128).
LITERARY ALLUSIONS

- The state of language is described as “the sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality” (75).
- Man reads old newspapers with references to that which no longer exist (24).
- Man enters library whose volumes are soggy and useless on the floor (158).
- Boy no longer studies the alphabet (206).
- Boy refuses to tell a story, not knowing any with happy endings (226).
- Father continues to tell his son stories from the past and of heroes—continuation of oral tradition and the uplifting of morals.
CANNIBALISM: HTTP://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?v=9BVTU7K6ESE
McCarthy envisions a post-apocalyptic world in which “murder was everywhere upon the land” and the earth would soon be “largely populated by men who would eat your children in front of your eyes” (181).

Representative of the evil that was already within men and the evil that occurs when moral structure is lost

Many instances of cannibalism by necessity were recorded during World War II. For example, during the 872-day Siege of Leningrad, reports of cannibalism began to appear in the winter of 1941–1942, after all birds, rats and pets were eaten by survivors. Leningrad police even formed a special division to combat cannibalism. Following the Soviet victory at Stalingrad it was found that some German soldiers in the besieged city, cut off from supplies, resorted to cannibalism.
CANNIBALISM IN CHINA

• Cannibalism was proven to have occurred in China during the Great Leap Forward, when rural China was hit hard by drought and famine. Reports of cannibalism during the Cultural Revolution in China have also emerged. These reports show that cannibalism was practiced for ideological purposes.

• During Mao’s “Cultural Revolution” local officials of the Chinese Communist Party exhorted their comrades to devour ‘class enemies.’ The documents refer to "eating people as an after-dinner snack ... barbecuing people’s livers ... banqueting on human meat."
The Soviet writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn describes cases of cannibalism in the twentieth-century USSR. Of the famine in Povolzhie (1921–1922) he writes: "That horrible famine was up to cannibalism, up to consuming children by their own parents…"

November 14, 2009, three homeless men in Moscow, Russia were arrested for killing and eating the parts of a twenty-five year old man. The remaining parts were then sold to a local pie/kebab house.
Another well-documented case occurred in Chichijima in February 1945, when Japanese soldiers killed and consumed five American airmen. In his book Flyboys: A True Story of Courage, James Bradley details several instances of cannibalism of World War II Allied prisoners by their Japanese captors. The author claims that this included not only ritual cannibalization of the livers of freshly-killed prisoners, but also the cannibalization-for-sustenance of living prisoners over the course of several days, amputating limbs only as needed to keep the meat fresh.
Cannibalism was reported by the journalist Neil Davis during the South East Asian wars of the 1960s and 1970s. Davis reported that Cambodian troops ritually ate portions of the slain enemy, typically the liver. However he, and many refugees, also report that cannibalism was practiced non-ritually when there was no food to be found. This usually occurred when towns and villages were under Khmer Rouge control, and food was strictly rationed, leading to widespread starvation. Any civilian caught participating in cannibalism would have been immediately executed.
CANNIBALISM IN AFRICA

- Cannibalism has been reported in several recent African conflicts, including the Second Congo War and the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. A U.N. human rights expert reported in July 2007 that sexual atrocities against Congolese women go 'far beyond rape' and include sexual slavery, forced incest, and cannibalism. This may be done in desperation, as during peacetime cannibalism is much less frequent; at other times, it is consciously directed at certain groups believed to be relatively helpless, such as Congo Pygmies, even considered subhuman by some other Congolese. It is also reported by some that witch doctors sometimes use the body parts of children in their medicine. In the 1970s the Ugandan dictator Idi Amin was reputed to practice cannibalism.
The Aghoris of northern India consume the flesh of the dead floated in the Ganges in pursuit of immortality and supernatural powers. Members of the Aghori drink from human skulls and practice cannibalism in the belief that eating human flesh confers spiritual and physical benefits, such as prevention of aging.
In March 2001 in Germany, Armin Meiwes posted an Internet ad asking for "a well built 18 to 30 year old to be slaughtered and consumed." The ad was answered by Bernd Jurgen Brandes. After killing Brandes and eating parts of his body, Meiwes was convicted of manslaughter and later, murder.
CANNIBALISM IN COLOMBIA

- In a documentary by Colombian journalist Hollman Morris, a demobilized paramilitary confessed that during the mass killings that take place in Colombia's rural areas, many of them performed cannibalism. He also confesses that they were told to drink the blood of their victims on the belief that it would make them want to kill more.